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Keep Persons With Disabilities In Mind During Inclement Weather

Lansing, MI – The Michigan Department of Civil Rights wants to remind Michigan residents and businesses to remember your neighbors with disabilities in the winter season. Debris and/or obstacles in the disability parking spaces or blocking curb cuts make it very difficult and dangerous for people with disabilities to get to their destination. In the winter, especially after snowfalls, these dangers are of even greater concern. People who use wheelchairs and walkers must negotiate, at the risk of their own safety, around dangerous icy ramps, snow covered curb cuts and accessible parking spaces filled with plowed snow.

Not only is adequate snow removal for disabled persons the right thing to do, it is also legally prudent. The Department of Civil Rights will investigate complaints regarding improper snow removal that hinders the access of persons with disabilities. The Michigan Persons With Disabilities Civil Rights Act states that “a person shall accommodate a person with a disability for purposes of employment, public accommodation, public service, education, or housing unless the person demonstrates that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship.” To the extent that accessible sidewalks are required in order to satisfy that obligation, those required sidewalks must be maintained in operable condition.

The Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns advises that good guidelines to observe while removing snow from public areas include: making sure that sidewalks are cleared all the way to the end, not just in portions; clearing a path that is at least 40” wide to accommodate people using wheelchairs; and keep curb cuts clear of snow and slush. Clearing snow to the surface of sidewalks and ice removal are also useful rules to abide by, as many mobility devices cannot function well on slick or slushy surfaces. Please also note that excessive use of salt can harm the feet of service animals. For more information on the Michigan Commission for Disability Concerns or the Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing, please visit <http://www.mcddc-dodhh.org> or call 1-877-499-6232.

For more information on the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, call 1-800-482-3604 or visit <http://www.michigan.gov/mdcr>.

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